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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, March 8, 1944

Subject: "MENDING COOKING MISTAKES" Information from distribution officials,
War Food Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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These days, we can't afford to waste food. We need every bit of food our farmers can produce to meet pressing war needs. Yet, we Americans continue to waste food. Twenty to twenty-five percent of all the food produced in the United States is wasted some place between the plough and the plate...and most of that is wasted in our own kitchens. That's more than enough to feed all our Armed Forces, and is more than we send our Allies and the liberated countries.

When we waste food in our homes, we don't actually throw into the garbage a whole roast of meat. We don't throw a whole loaf of bread into the fire. We don't pour quarts of milk down the sink. But we waste these foods in little drops or pieces...and the little bits wasted eventually mount up to a whole roast, a whole loaf, a whole quart. And when you think of these wasted roasts, loaves, and quarts in terms of a whole nation of homemakers, you have a huge amount of good nourishing food gone to waste.

One way many of us waste food at home is in cooking. Can you honestly say you've never burned any food? Or that you've never thrown out a cake that didn't rise as it should, or a gravy or custard that was lumpy or curdled?

If you can honestly say you never have, then you're very unusual. Especially if you've never burned food. Most people have too many distractions while they're cooking to give the job their full attention. Perhaps the baby needs you...or your pet program is on the radio...or the telephone rings. When you come back to the kitchen, there's a bittersweet smell in the air...the food is scorched. It's often heart-breaking. You hate wasting good food...and you especially dislike

ruining a favorite food. What can you do about it?

Well, you need forethought...and then quick action if the food burns.

Beforehand...you can keep the food from burning if you're careful. Always remember to turn the fire very low under the saucepan when you go to answer the door...and turn off the fire if you're in another room listening to the radio. Often, when you're cooking food that needs constant attention, the worst problem is sheer boredom. Why not put the radio in the kitchen...you can listen as you stir the cornstarch pudding. Sometimes if you have a long stirring job ahead it helps to have a book handy where you can both stir and read.

Here's the best idea of all: Cook foods made with milk or chocolate in a double boiler. It takes longer, but it's safer if you're busy with other things.

But in spite of all your efforts...sometimes the prunes or carrots or pudding will scorch. That's when you need to know first aid methods for food burns...and you can often salvage most of the food and flavor.

When you sniff the first suspicious smell...turn the heat right off. Reach for a clean pan or dish...put the food that doesn't stick to the old pan into the clean one right away. Don't stir the scorched part around or the burnt taste will spread. And put the old pan to soak.

Once the food's in a clean pan, the next step depends on what kind of food you burn. Maybe it's potatoes. If so, add more water to the potatoes, and continue cooking. When the potatoes are done, cream them. If they still taste scorched add a little cheese or pimento. If the potatoes are too badly scorched for the cream method...toss them into hot bacon fat...brown quickly...and shower generously with salt and pepper.

Scorched milk and egg dishes need the same kind of camouflage treatment. If you burn an omelet or scrambled eggs...add a dash of Worcestershire sauce or catsup to hide the burnt taste. If those aren't on your first-aid shelf...turn the

scorched egg into Spanish omelet. Make a sauce of tomatoes and diced onion. Serve this sauce over the eggs...your family will never suspect the real reason.

If you've scorched a food with milk in it...like custard or cornstarch pudding...the job of camouflage takes even more skill. First, remove to a clean pan. Then, hide the burnt taste with a stronger flavor. A dash of vanilla may be enough. But it's more likely you'll need something stronger. Try chocolate...or some caramelized sugar...or sliced bananas if you find them in your market. Lemon extract or fresh lemon juice would be another idea.

But the best way to treat scorched milk is...not to scorch it in the first place. Cook it over a very low flame...or better still, cook it in the top part of a double boiler. Then you're not taking chances with good food.

Now let's look briefly at some other cooking mistakes...and how to mend them. Is your gravy lumpy? Don't throw it out. Use your egg-beater to bring it to a creamy consistency. And the same tool will smooth out a custard that's curdled.

Were the biscuits you baked for dinner a bit too hard? Don't throw them out. Grumble them up and cover them with a favorite sauce or with a creamed food, like creamed ham and parsley.

Did the cake fall? Don't dream of discarding it. Serve it on individual plates as a pudding with a fruit sauce. Or slice through and make several layers of the fallen cake, and put it together with a tasty frosting or filling.

Was the meat tough? Grind it up and use it for sandwich filling, or a salad, or in a baked dish. It'll seem tender as the white meat of a chicken.

These are only a few of the million ideas you can think up for mending cooking mistakes. Remember how important it is to save food especially in wartime, and put the ideas into practice.

